

# BEGINNERS' CIRCLE

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## Rookie Mistakes

Last weekend, I watched New England Patriots' quarterback Tom Brady throw an interception during one of the National Football League playoff games. This superstar and future Hall of Fame QB made one of those "rookie mistakes." The kind of mistakes that old players, in their pretty suits, sitting behind their clean desks, talk about. I imagine that you might think the same about me. Who am I to be such a know-it-all? When was the last time I was faced with third and long? Can I even remember the last time I made a bone-headed decision?

You are right about the memory issues, but I really wish you hadn't asked those questions. Still, the purpose of this column is to help you avoid as many mistakes as possible. Most often, that means confessing to some things that I am not proud of.

I have a wonderful passage redtail hawk this year. Her name is "Sweetie Pie" and she is one. I have trained a lot of passage birds but NEVER one as sweet as Sweetie. This girl still hasn't bated from the fist more than twenty times—total! Honest! It is remarkable how steady and unflappable (pardon the pun) she is.

It is a good thing she is so sweet because I made a string of rookie mistakes with her one day early in her training. If she were not so sweet, she would not be sitting on her bow perch outside my patio doors right now.

Due to my job, I have to commute each week between my home in the country and an apartment in the city where I work during the week. This means that I have to transport all of my hawking equipment between two abodes each week.

At the time of this embarrassing episode, Sweetie and I were just getting into creance flights. Sweetie was wedded to the lure. We were just working on distance, outdoor distractions, and finding her flying weight. One Saturday, Sweetie was ready to go—but I wasn't. I had forgotten both her lure and creance line at the apartment. How do these things happen? I personally believe in Murphy's Law—with an acceptance of my own fallibility and age-onset forgetfulness.

One more thing was against us. Sweetie and I had been working in freezing temperatures all week. Suddenly, it was 50 degrees! I knew she would not be as keen to come to me, but was not worried since we would be working on the creance.

Undaunted by the warm weather and by the absence of my redtail creance and lure, I pressed ahead. I used my much lighter-weight kestrel creance instead. "After all," I reasoned, "Sweetie is so sweet. She will only be flying to the fist a few times. No danger of her trying to fly off and breaking the cord." I have had these types of bone-headed thoughts before, and always regretted my subsequent actions.

Do I really need to say it? I called Sweetie to the fist a distance of twenty feet. She rocketed past me,

headed for the wood line behind the house. The creance snapped like it was made for a kestrel; she was now 20 feet up in a tree, 50 feet away.

Now, I am not such a rookie as you might be thinking. This breakage of the creance line did not, in any way, endanger Sweetie. Her jesses were not attached together. Sweetie was in no danger from

And now for my third mistake: not having a backup/duplicate lure. Sweetie loves her lure, as every hawk should. But hers was four hours away, and I wasn't going to leave her in that woodlot alone. Fortunately, and not by accident, I feed mostly whole food to Sweetie: day-old chicks and extra-large white mice (from Rodent Pro). The truth is that these critters become as much of a "lure" as the leather one I carry.

So, I ran to the garage and found an old glove the same color and size as the lure and tied a leash and a day-old chick to it. It took some time for her to decide what she wanted to do, but like I said, Sweetie is very sweet. She finally flew down to her strange lure and me.

My wife, Marcie, witnessed the whole thing, and she was very sweet about it too. However, I think she and Sweetie had a good laugh at my expense later that day.

My hope is that by my sharing these mistakes with you, you will avoid them. Learn from my mistakes. That's why I am telling you about them so candidly. The well-being of your hawk is at stake!

Don't drink milk that smell bads. Don't eat the yellow snow. And don't do what I have just told you about. If you don't learn from my bone-headed plays, you might not be as fortunate as I was. Your hawk might truly be lost to you—or worse—might be lost and endangered by a swivel connecting her jesses together. Please do not make these mistakes with your hawk. Your hawk just might not be as sweet as my Sweetie Pie!

*In the United States, as well as most other countries, you must be licensed to practice falconry. For more information on getting started in falconry, visit our web site at [www.americanfalconry.com/beginners.html](http://www.americanfalconry.com/beginners.html)*

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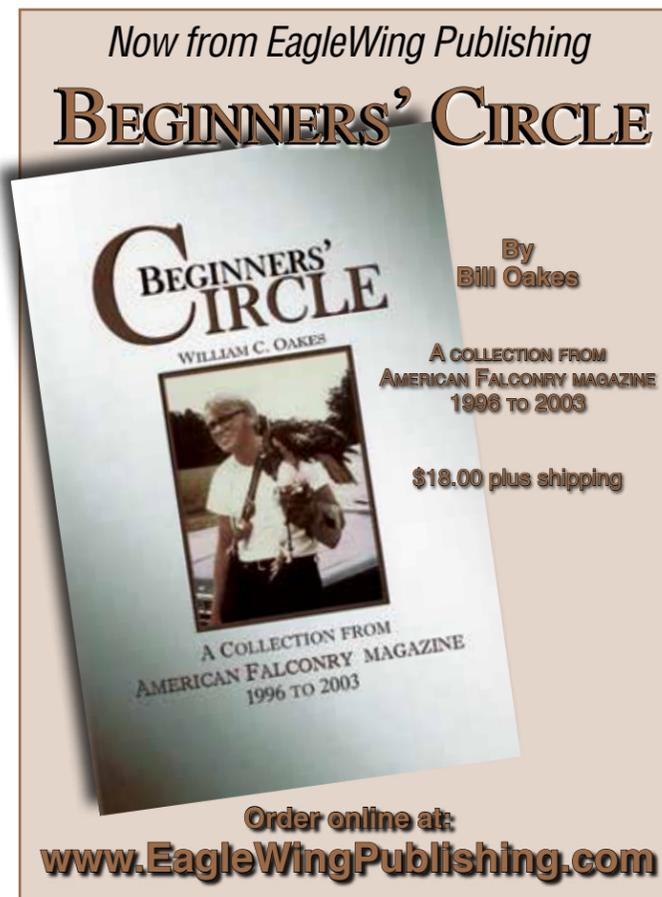
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A COLLECTION FROM AMERICAN FALCONRY MAGAZINE 1996 TO 2003

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dangling equipment—but she was in the woods, high in a tree, and enjoying the view. Sweetie's first free flight was underway!

Let's review: My first mistake was not having a backup/duplicate creance suitable for a redtail. But that wouldn't have been a problem if not for my second mistake, that of placing too much trust in a really sweet but unproven hawk—particularly on a day when the temperature was suddenly very warm. Those two mistakes left me with a really sweet hawk free flying in a woodlot behind my country home, without telemetry, without bells, and without sufficient interest in me.

